

New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee

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CELEBRATING 50



Message from the Chair:

Reducing Test Anxiety

Many educators have personally experienced the heartache of having young students break down in tears under the stress of standardized testing. Others tell stories of high school students opting out—or worse, walking out—of a high stakes assessment.

Such stories prompted legislation during the 2015 regular legislative session that would have limited or even eliminated required assessments for New Mexico's students. And yes, these scenarios tug on our heart strings and make us want to suspend all testing, but we also owe it to our kids to recognize that some tests are valuable as tools to inform teaching and learning.

So the Legislature, working in a bipartisan manner, found a healthy balance.

Sincere concern for the academic and emotional welfare of our students, tempered by an obligation to make rational decisions, led the Legislature to require that all school districts and charter schools take an honest look at their assessment practices via a tool called the New Mexico Assessment Inventory (NMAI). The Public Education Department (PED) has proven itself a valuable partner in this call to action by helping schools analyze their practices, identify problems, and facilitate changes. The data are now catching up to our discussions, and the facts confirm some of our feelings that assessment practices need to change.

Essentially, some schools do over test their students. NMAI results reveal that some schools give two or three formative assessments in reading or math when one would suffice, and many of our high school students take a district-developed final exam for

their courses in addition to the end-of-course exam provided by the state. Eliminating such duplication will reduce stress on our students, increase instructional time, and save money that can be put back into the classroom.

Misconceptions also abound. The NMAI results reveal confusion among our school leaders about which assessments are required by law, making them question their ability to change things actually within their power. Meanwhile, as critics of the status quo are quick to remind us, the amount of instructional time indirectly disrupted by preparing for and giving tests was not measured by the NMAI. Both the Legislature and PED have a role to play in addressing these issues, starting with the leading article on the NMAI in this newsletter.

On the bright side, the facts also show New Mexico is leading the way nationally. In fact, President Obama recently praised our state as a model for limiting the time spent on state summative assessments to under 2 percent of class time, and he called on the nation to follow suit.

Through collaborative use of our NMAI data, we have the opportunity to set a shining example for the rest of the country in our assessment practices. I'm proud of the work we are continuing to do together, for the benefit of our students and their schools!

Sincerely,

Representative Dennis J. Roch
Chair

New Mexico Assessment Inventory – Statewide Results: On the heels of the US Department of Education (USDE) recommending that states and school districts evaluate the number of tests administered to students and consider eliminating those to be ineffective or duplicative, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) announced the statewide results of the New Mexico Assessment Inventory (NMAI) to the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) at the October 2015 meeting.

The NMAI was required by the *General Appropriation Act of 2015 (GAA of 2015)* after debate on the number of required assessments and testing time dominated the first part of the hearings in the House and Senate Education committees during the 2015 session. The topic of testing created collaborative conversations that resulted in language included in the *GAA of 2015* requiring all charter schools and school districts to conduct an assessment inventory by October 14, 2015 to better inform stakeholders about assessment practices in public schools.

A PED memorandum sent to all school districts and charter schools explained that the NMAI was designed to: assist districts and charter schools in obtaining a comprehensive picture of assessment practices; demonstrate how those practices impact student outcomes; and assist PED in supporting school districts and charter

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schools to effectively implement assessment best practices for teaching and learning.

The Deputy Secretary of Policy and Programs at PED testified that responses were received from 56 school districts and 19 charter schools. The results of the NMAI can be categorized into the following three components: (1) assessments clearly articulated to PED that are aligned to federal and state mandates; (2) evidence of “over testing,” including indication of duplicative assessment efforts; and (3) areas of needed clarification, including misconceptions of federally and state required assessments.

While noting that a handful of school districts and charter schools met all of the federal and state requirements, PED acknowledged that data from the inventory also suggested evidence of over testing and duplication. For example, a number of school districts reported using two or more interim assessments for third grade reading like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS Next), Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Discovery Assessment and STAR Reading. Data from the NMAI also indicated that some districts have misconceptions about which entity required the assessments.

PED indicated that the NMAI didn’t explain why districts have maintained the use of additional interim assessments in kindergarten through third grade when the state pays for DIBELS Next for all school districts and charter schools that participate in K-3 Plus and Reads to Lead!, and suggested this is an area where school districts and charter schools can save money and time spent on duplication.

The department has been clear that interim assessments can be a great tool if the data are used to drive learning and instruction but schools should not administer more than one assessment per subject, per grade level.

At the committee’s September 2015 meeting in Silver City, the committee heard from two districts about their experiences completing their NMAI. Both districts agreed that even though interim assessments are not mandated for all grades, they choose to assess students in kindergarten through 10th grade to

measure student progress toward grade-level standards. They noted the interim assessments are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, are used as a research-based evidence tool to identify ways to remediate and provide interventions for academic success toward grade-level standards through the response to intervention (RtI) model, and provide immediate results to track students’ academic progress and immediately inform teacher practice. They articulated that interim assessments are also used as part of the teacher evaluation system.

A bright spot for New Mexico was evident in the October 19, 2015 White House Fact Sheet that indicated New Mexico already meets the federal recommendation of capping mandated assessments so they do not take up more than 2.0 percent of instructional time. PED recognized that it needs to improve communication about testing requirements. The department is committed to continuing the conversation with school leaders about testing practices to ensure instructional time is used efficiently. While NMAI results did not capture data regarding the amount of time that assessments interrupt instruction, PED stressed this was a first step toward future collaborative conversations with stakeholders and the Legislature about testing practices in our public schools. PED hopes to have the statewide results of the NMAI posted to their website within a few weeks.

The following assessments are required as part of the state assessment program: interim assessment (DIBELS Next) for screening and monitoring in kindergarten through second grade; accountability assessment in reading and math (PARCC) in third grade through 11th grade; accountability assessment in science and writing (SBA) in fourth, seventh, and 11th grades; end-of-course (EoC) and final exams for all courses for high school credit in ninth through 12th grade; and interim assessment in ninth and 10th grade in reading, math, and writing (these short-cycle assessments are chosen by the district). A more in-depth description is available on the PED website at: <http://ped.state.nm.us/assessmentaccountability/assessmentevaluation/index.html>

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Action Team Goals and Recommendations: The New Mexico STEM Action Team, a statewide coalition of math and science experts in education, government, and industry organized in 2012 by the New Mexico Partnership for Mathematics and Science Education and New Mexico First, presented goals and recommendations related to increasing the number of students graduating in STEM fields in New Mexico over the next five years. The team established the following three goals to achieve by 2020:

1. increase the number of students measurably proficient in English and math by 25 percent;
2. graduate 1,000 new science and math teachers while also supporting and retaining existing STEM teachers; and

3. increase the number of college graduates in STEM fields (including health) by 25 percent.

In addition, the STEM Action Team provided a list of 11 recommendations for the Legislature to consider in support of K-12 STEM education, STEM teachers, and college students in STEM fields at: http://nmfirst.org/legislative_updates/stem-action-team-presents-goals-and-recommendations-to-nm-legislators.

The College Board: The Senior Director of Government Relations for The College Board informed the committee that each year The College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for successful transition to college through programs and services including the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, and Advanced Placement (AP). The AP program is a collaboration between motivated students, secondary schools, colleges, and universities. It currently offers 37 courses nationally and, in 2016, will add Computer Science Principles.

Noting rates of underrepresented and low-income students in New Mexico that are higher than the national average, the director explained that in 2013, a partnership between New Mexico and The College Board began with a goal to increase access to rigorous secondary school coursework based on college and career readiness with opportunities to reduce college cost.

Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) Efforts to Produce Positive Outcomes for Foster Children:

CYFD staff briefed the committee on department efforts to increase positive educational outcomes for children in New Mexico's foster care system. The department's work in this area includes a "Safe Schools Summit," sponsored in partnership with PED, as well as direct collaboration with schools on matters related to child safety. For instance, in Bernalillo and Santa Fe counties, CYFD has assigned case workers to liaise with schools and communities on issues of student safety, while a special liaison is assigned to each foster child in Hobbs to help ensure that they have access to necessary resources for educational success.

Several programs that support foster children into the postsecondary education system were noted by CYFD. First, the committee was reminded of legislation, passed in 2014, that created a college tuition waiver program for youth who are aging out of the foster care system or who were adopted

In regard to the AP programs and higher education, the director told the committee that in school year 2014-2015, New Mexico families saved over \$3 million through successful scores on AP exams. She noted that some of the reasons are because students who take AP courses succeed in college, AP provides opportunities for underrepresented students to succeed, and AP credit opportunities attract motivated and prepared students.

To conclude, the director stated that strong AP programs in high school, coupled with data-driven policies in colleges and universities support many positive outcomes for students. Multiple research studies have confirmed that students who achieve scores of 3 or higher on AP exams perform well in subsequent college courses and are more likely to major in their AP subject or a related discipline, particularly in STEM subjects.

after the age of 16. At least 21 other states have such programs for foster youth; moreover, according to CYFD, recent multistate studies of former foster youth indicate that approximately 44 percent of young people who drop out of postsecondary education report that they do so because they cannot afford tuition and fees, with 59 percent indicating that financial difficulties are the biggest barrier to continuing their education.

Another program that supports foster youth is the federally supported but state-administered Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program, which offers vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year to help defray educational and vocational training costs. Billed as a system of academic and social support for these challenged students, the ETV Program was originally instituted in 2002 to assist these vulnerable youth with such issues as choosing an appropriate postsecondary program, financing an education, and accessing campus and community resources.

College of Education Performance Reports: Public Education Department (PED) staff presented an update on the creation of a performance report for each New Mexico college of education (COE). In September of 2011, the United States Department of Education (USDE) published "Our Future, Our Teachers", which set the groundwork for a proposed report card of individual colleges of education to include: (1) aggregate learning outcome data of K-12 students taught by graduates, using student achievement data; (2) job placements and retention rates of graduates, particularly in hard to staff areas; and (3) perception data from graduates of the program and principals of graduates. USDE released a proposed rule on teacher preparation program performance reports in November of 2014 that emphasized outcomes, such as tracking how graduates are doing in the classroom, to differentiate between programs and hold programs accountable; USDE has yet to issue a final rule on the matter.

PED began working with New Mexico COEs to establish a performance report in April of 2014 and data-sharing agreements were signed this past summer with all the teacher preparation programs. PED staff stated COEs will have

access to data they historically have not had access to, such as student achievement data, classroom performance evaluation information, and National Evaluation Series beginning teacher test passage rates. COEs will also receive information on where their teachers are placed as well as retention rates of those teachers. PED staff indicated the performance report will be used as a component of teacher preparation program approval as well as to develop future policy proposals and discussion.

COE staff recognized the value of the data sharing agreement, though they indicated some concerns still exist. First, they requested sufficient time to review the last round of teacher graduates attributed to each of their programs. Second, they would like to review the finalized performance reports before the results are released to the public to ensure accuracy and asked that PED release the metrics used to determine the final ratings, including how outside factors, if any, will be factored into the performance report. Lastly, COE staff questioned whether the performance reports will work in conjunction with the statutorily required annual Educator Accountability Reporting System report.

OCTOBER INTERIM MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Debit Cards for Teacher Supplies: Paul Aguilar, Deputy Secretary of Finance and Operations, Public Education Department (PED) presented information on the department's teacher supply initiative. The department requested funding for the program after hearing from teachers that they were using their own money to buy classroom supplies. In response, the Legislature appropriated \$2 million to PED to provide a \$100 prepaid debit card to each teacher to purchase classroom supplies. Debit cards were distributed based on the number of teachers in a school district's or charter school's approved budget, resulting in under- or over-allocation of debit cards in some school districts and charter schools. PED worked with school districts and charter schools to return over-allocations and redistribute debit cards where necessary. Debit cards were to be distributed to teachers by September 18, 2015, though

time was extended to October 31, 2015 for Albuquerque Public Schools and Las Cruces Public Schools. Teachers have until January 31, 2016 to spend the funds or unspent funds will revert to the state. Mr. Aguilar indicated the department will be conducting a desk audit of 5 percent of the debit cards, requiring teachers to keep any receipts for five years. Several implementation issues were identified, including the need to provide the state's tax exempt identification number to teachers earlier and to provide a list of approved vendors to school district and charter school program coordinators in advance. PED noted teachers have generally been supportive of the program and committed to addressing implementation issues if the program receives continued funding.

NOVEMBER AGENDA TOPICS

- **Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Northern New Mexico Inquiry Science Education Consortium (ISEC)** — the CEO of the LANL Foundation will update the committee on the results of its education project.
- **Communities in Schools: Supporting Students at Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS)** — the Executive Director of Communities in Schools and SFPS staff will discuss their efforts to support Santa Fe students.
- **FY 16 Public School Health and Risk Insurance Request** — representatives from the New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority and Albuquerque Public Schools will brief the committee on the status of their insurance plans.
- **Highly Qualified Teacher Waiver: Providing Flexibility to Schools to Place Effective Teachers** — the Director of PED's Educator Quality Division and the Superintendent of Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools will inform the LESC on how the waiver program is working at the agency and district level.
- **Addressing the Equity Gap: Ensuring Access to Excellent Educators for All Students in New Mexico** — PED's Director of Policy will provide an overview of the department's efforts to ensure all students have a high quality teacher.
- **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessment Results** — PED's Deputy Secretary for Policy and Program will join school district superintendents to review PARCC test results and discuss next steps.
- **LESC-LFC Ad Hoc Work Group Recommendations and Bill Drafts** — staff will present work group recommendations and bill drafts as the LESC prepares to endorse legislation for the 2016 legislative session.

Legislative Education Study Committee



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